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Poets

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Lincoln Poetry

Poets

William Cullen Bryant

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Abraham Lincoln.

Oh slow to smite and swift to spare,
Gentle, and merciful and just,
Who, in the fear of God, didst bear
The sword of power, a noble trust!

In sorrow by thy bier we stand,
And the awe that hushed all,
And speak the anguish of a land
That shook with horror at thy fall.

Thy task is done, the bond are free;
We bear thee to an honored grave
Whose proudest monument shall be
The broken fetters of the slave.

Pure was thy life, its bloody close
Hath placed thee with the sons of light,
Among the noble host of those
Who perished in the cause of Right.

William Cullen Bryant.
April 1865.

WHEN LINCOLN DIED

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Forty-nine years ago the 15 day of April, 1865, the great heart of Abraham Lincoln was stilled by the assassin's bullet, that struck him down the day previous, the saddest day and event in the nation's history. On this anniversary it is well to pause a moment to consider the character of the man. In 1860, at Springfield, Ill., Mr. Lincoln delivered the following speech: "I know there is a God, and that He hates injustice and slavery. I see the storm coming, and I know His hand is in it. If He has a place and a work for me—and I think He has—I believe I am ready. I am nothing, but truth is everything. I know I am right, because I know that liberty is right, for Christ teaches it, and Christ is God, I have told them that a house divided against itself can not stand. Christ and reason say the same thing, and they will find it so. Douglas doesn't care whether slavery is voted up or down, but God cares, and humanity cares, and I care and with God's help I shall not fall. I may not see the end, but it will come, and I shall be vindicated, and these men will find out that they have not read their Bibles aright."

When Dr. Long said to his friend, "Well, Lincoln, that foolish speech will kill you---will defeat you for all officers for all time," referring to the "house divided" speech, Mr. Lincoln replied: "If I had to draw a pen across and erase my whole life from existence, and had one poor choice left as to what I should save from the wreck, I should choose that speech, and leave it to the world unerased. You may think that speech a mistake, but I have never believed it was. And you will see the day when you will consider it the wisest thing I ever did."

It is fitting to reprint this poem on Lincoln by William Cullen Bryant:

O, slow to smite and swift to spare,
Gentle and merciful and just,
Who, in the fear of God didst bear
The sword of power---a nation's trust.

In sorrow by thy bier we stand,
Amid the awe that hushes all,
And speak anguish of the land
That shook horror at thy fall.

Thy task is done, the bond are free,
We bear thee to an honored grave,
Whose proudest monument shall be
The broken fetters of a slave.

Pure was thy life, its bloody close
Has placed thee with the sons of light,
Among the noble host of those,
Who perish for the right.

The writer was raised at Naples, near Springfield, Ill., and when a boy frequently saw and heard Mr. Lincoln talk; at one time sat opposite him at dinner. On this occasion Mr. Lincoln had been debating with Stephen A. Douglas, and took dinner with Mr. John White, an old friend, an abolitionist, the writers uncle. And how eagerly, especially when a young boy in the Union army, did we follow his wonderful career until the great pall fell upon the country at the time of his death.

WILL B. SMITH, "On Wheels."

LINCOLN

William Cullen Bryant's Ode For the
Martyred President's Obsequies
Read In New York, April 25, 1865

1516

OH, slow to smite and swift to spare,
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That shook with horror at thy fall.

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Pure was thy life; its bloody close
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Who perished in the cause of Right.

Byrant, William Cullen

"The Death of Lincoln

"Oh, slow to smite and swift to
spare,"

THE DEATH OF LINCOLN

*Oh, slow to smite and swift to spare,
Gentle and merciful and just!
Who, in the fear of God, didst bear
The sword of power, a nation's
trust!*

*In sorrow by thy bier we stand,
Amid the awe that hushes all,
And speak the anguish of a land
That shook with horror at thy
fall.*

*Thy task is done; the bond is free;
We bear thee to an honored grave,
Whose proudest monument shall be
The broken fetters of the slave.*

*Pure was thy life; its bloody close
Hath placed thee with the sons of
light,
Among the noble host of those
Who perished in the cause of
Right.* Brooklyn Times Union
WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

2-12-35

Ode for the Funeral of Abraham Lincoln

By William Cullen Bryant.

O H, slow to smite and swift to spare,
Gentle and merciful and just!
Who, in the fear of God, didst bear
The sword of power—a nation's trust.

In sorrow by thy bier we stand,
Amid the awe that hushes all,
And speak the anguish of a land
That shook with horror at thy fall.

Thy task is done—the bond are free—
We bear thee to an honored grave,
Whose proudest monument shall be
The broken fetters of the slave.

Pure was thy life; its bloody close
Hath placed thee with the sons of light,
Among the noble host of those
Who perished in the cause of right.

POEMS FOR YOUR SCRAPBOOK

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Written in 1865 by William Cullen Bryant

O, slow to smite and swift to spare,
Gentle and merciful and just!
Who, in the fear of God, didst bear
The sword of power—a nation's trust.

In sorrow by thy bier we stand,
Amid the awe that hushes all,
And speak the anguish of a land
That shook with horror at thy fall.

Thy task is done—the bond are free;
We bear thee to an honored grave,
Whose noblest monument shall be
The broken fetters of the slave.

Pure was thy life; its bloody close
Hath placed thee with the sons of light,
Among the noble host of those
Who perished in the cause of right.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

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spare,
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The sword of power, a nation's
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of light,
Among the noble host of those
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Right.

Bryant, William Cullen

THE DEATH OF LINCOLN

"Oh slow to smite and swift
to spare"

THE DEATH OF LINCOLN.
Oh, slow to smite and swift to spare,
Gentle and merciful and just!
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Thy task is done; the bonds are free;
We bear thee to an honored grave,
Whose proudest monument shall be
The broken fetters of the slave.

Pure was thy life; its bloody close
Hath passed thee with the sons of
light,
Among the noble host of those
Who perished in the cause of right.
—WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

Bryant, Wm. Cullen
1794-1878

ABRAHAM
Lincoln

"Oh slow to smite and swift to spare --"

Abraham Lincoln

By William Cullen Bryant

This poem, sometimes called "The Death of Lincoln", was written in April, 1865, for the day when Lincoln's body was carried in funeral procession through the streets to New York City. The striking thing about the poem is that it still voices the feeling that we of today have for the great martyr and for the cause for which he died.

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LINCOLN

William Cullen Bryant's Ode For the
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Read In New York, April 25, 1865

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Who perished in the cause of Right.

Lincoln's funeral was one of the most extraordinary in the world's history. The mourners numbered more than 25,000,000. The funeral cortège moved over a route more than 1,500 miles long, from the national capital, where the great president had laid down his life in the service of his country, to the prairie city of Springfield, Ill., whence he had come a little more than four years before to take up the burdens of the presidency.

Along that route various halts were made, where sorrowing throngs paid their homage of grief at the bier of the best-beloved man of his time. The nation's tribute to Lincoln dead, on this solemn funeral journey, was spontaneous, simple, genuine, showing how deeply the plain, honest, humane and loving man had touched the hearts of his countrymen. Men and women gazed upon his features for the last time, and wept beside his coffin, as though mourning dear friend. This personal touch of sorrow, this tribute to the man and not to the fallen ruler, was the distinguishing feature of the great funeral of Abraham Lincoln.

The funeral, begun in Washington on April 19, lasted until May 4, when the body of the president was put to rest in a vault at Oak Ridge cemetery, Spring-

field, in the rolling, open country of Illinois, which he had loved so well.

On the morning of Lincoln's death, in the little bed room of a lodging house in Tenth street, Washington, to which he had been removed from the theater where Booth shot him, his body, in a temporary coffin, was taken to the White house. There it was embalmed and placed in a suitable casket, and there it lay, in the east room, until the morning of April 19.

Then, while the churches of the country were holding solemn services of requiem, the body was drawn in a great funeral car through the black-draped streets of Washington to the capitol, where it was to lie in state.

The strength and dignity of the nation found expression in that first stage of Lincoln's long funeral journey. Seasoned troops, splendidly equipped, from the great army that had brought the war for the union to a successful issue only ten days before, formed the funeral escort.

The new president, his cabinet, senators and representatives, judges, army and navy officers, foreign ministers and dignitaries in civil life followed the funeral car. Among those mourners were special delegations representing Lincoln's native state of Kentucky and his adopted state of Illinois, and at the head of the procession, in symbolism of Lincoln's life-

work done, marched a detachment of negro troops.

Mourning Crowds in Baltimore.

From the forenoon of April 19 to the evening of April 20, Lincoln's body lay in state under the capitol's lofty dome, while mourning thousands passed in slow procession before it, and viewed the pale face beneath a plate of glass.

It was decided that the funeral journey should be in reverse of the route Lincoln had followed when he came to Washington for his inauguration.

On the morning of April 21 the body was escorted with solemn pomp to a funeral train and placed in a car that had been reserved in the war time for the use of the president. Here on a plain, black-draped stand the casket was placed. Across the head of the apartment was another and much smaller casket that contained the body of Lincoln's little son Willie, whose death at the White house in 1862 had been a severe blow to the president. The little form was now to make the last journey to a final resting place in Springfield.

An official guard of honor, members of the president's family, representatives of state and nation, army and navy, judiciary and executive, occupied the train, which at 8 a. m. drew out of Washington for the funeral journey.

The first stop was at Baltimore, the city through which Lincoln had been obliged to hurry at night when on his way to Washington to escape supposed assassins. Although the day was stormy, with heavy wind and rain, crowds waited the funeral train and when the body, placed in a great hearse drawn by four black horses and escorted by military forces and wailing bands, was taken to the exchange, the people reverently bared their heads as it passed.

Beneath the dome of the exchange the coffin was placed in a catafalque and past it for an hour and a half moved a steady line of people. At 2:30 the coffin was closed and the funeral march was resumed to a station, from which the train departed for Harrisburg, Pa.

Pennsylvania's capital was reached at 8 in the evening. In its storm-washed streets throngs waited to watch the passing of the funeral cortège to the state capitol. Here, until midnight, the body was exposed to view to a stream of mourners. Next morning the capitol was opened at 7 and the crowds poured in again, while disappointed thousands waited outside. At noon the funeral journey was resumed for Philadelphia.

At Independence Hall.

As the funeral train passed through villages and towns on the line to Philadelphia people assembled at the stations and along the line and stood with bared heads to watch it pass. For some miles outside Philadelphia the lines of mourners were practically continuous.

Through streets densely crowded with people, who bared their heads, the body of Lincoln was borne in a great funeral car escorted by military and civil bodies and preceded by bands playing dirges to Independence hall.

Here, in the historic chamber that witnessed the founding of the republic, Lincoln was laid. The hall had been draped in black to receive him and his coffin was placed beneath a sable canopy in the center of the room. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers.

At 10 in the evening the doors were opened to the public, who until midnight filed past the coffin, while bands stationed outside the hall played dirges. At midnight the hall doors were closed; but as the funeral guards looked from the windows at times in the night they saw groups of people in the park waiting patiently for morning and an opportunity to gaze upon the features of Lincoln. Many of them were poor and they had brought humble tributes of flowers to place upon Lincoln's bier.

All day Sunday (April 23) and until 1 o'clock Monday morning a crowd poured in orderly files into Independence hall past the coffin and out of the building.

Some of the men who looked their last upon Lincoln here recalled that in that very hall on February 22, 1861, when on his way to Washington to take up his burden, Lincoln had delivered a brief, eloquent speech, concluding with these words, "I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by, and, if it be the pleasure of Almighty God, to die by." On the same day at a flag-raising outside the building he had said that the country could be saved without giving up the principle of the Declaration of Independence, adding, "I was about to say I would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it."

Services in New York.

In the forenoon of April 24 the funeral journey was resumed to New York city. The rotunda of the fine old City hall had been draped with crepe and black velvet, and on a catafalque at the entrance of the governor's room the coffin was placed.

The square and all the streets about were densely crowded. At 1 o'clock the procession past the body began. Outside the door thousands formed in line, and all through a day uncomfortably warm, and into the night, those not near enough to enter held their places with ever-fresh accessions.

Within the hall singing societies chanted solemn music; outside the deep tones of dirges filled the air, while eighty persons a minute passed the body, forty on each side. It was well toward morning before there was a break in the line, but with the coming of daylight the press began again, and again the streets and square became crowded.

Among those who looked upon the body here was General Winfield Scott, the aged commander of the army at the outbreak of the war.

At noon on Tuesday the doors were closed, after 150,000 persons had viewed the body. Then, through great crowds in the draped streets, a funeral procession escorted the coffin to the train. In Union square a halt was made and services were held with an oration by George Bancroft, the historian.

The funeral train left New York for the journey west at 4:15 April 25. All up the Hudson the train was greeted with demonstrations, although it stopped only at Poughkeepsie. At one town a hundred white-clad school girls stood singing by the track. In another a young woman representing the Goddess of Liberty knelt in mourning attitude upon a daisy, the flag draped in black, in her hand.

At West Point the cadets were drawn up in line, minute guns were fired and the bands played dirges as the train passed.

After dark, torches lighted the faces of the mourning people as they stood uncovered to watch the passing of the funeral train.

Albany to Springfield.

At Albany the body was taken to the state capitol at midnight, and at 1 o'clock the casket was opened in the assembly chamber. Until 2 o'clock in the day people filed past it in two lines.

The next stop on the funeral journey was Buffalo, April 27, where the body was placed in St. James Hall, and was viewed by thousands from 8:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. In its escort here was ex-President Millard Fillmore.

From Buffalo the funeral train went to Cleveland, where on April 28 the body was placed in a structure erected for the purpose in a park. Here the burial service of the Episcopal church was read by Bishop McIlvaine of the Diocese of Ohio. About 100,000 persons viewed the body between morning and 10 p.m. It was returned to the funeral car in a torrential downpour, and the journey was resumed to Columbus, O., which was reached on the morning of April 29.

Here it was borne into the state capitol, under an arch inscribed "Ohio Mourns," and lay in state in the rotunda, funeral services being held in the afternoon.

A night journey brought the funeral train next to Indianapolis. Bonfires and torches had lighted its way, and at many stations were funeral arches and delegations of mourners.

Rain prevented a pageant here, but the body was viewed by thousands in the state house.

Thence the journey, now nearing its end, was continued to Chicago, where, on May 11, the body was placed in the courthouse. Musical numbers and a dirge chanted by German singing societies were a feature of the services here. For two days the body lay in state, viewed by thousands of the "plain people" whom Lincoln loved and understood full well.

The last stage of the long funeral journey to Springfield was made on May 13, and on May 14, after resting one night in the Illinois state house, the body of Lincoln was committed with simple and impressive ceremony to the tomb.

See

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McClure

1875
on

see

Abraham Lincoln.

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Gentle and merciful and just!
Who, in the fear of God, didst bear
The sword of power, a nation's trust:

Pure was thy life; its bloody close
Hath placed thee with the sons of
Light,
Among the noble host of those
Who perished in the cause of Right.
William Cullen Bryant.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

BRYANT

IGNAZ HEIM



1. Oh slow to smite and swift to spare, Gen - tle and mer - ci - ful, and just! Who,
2. Thy task is done; the bond are free; We bear thee to an honor'd grave, Whose



in the fear of God didst bear The sword of power, a na-tion's trust! In
proud-est mon-u-ments shall be The bro - ken fet - teis of the slave. Pure



sor - row by thy bier we stand, A - mid the awe that hush - es all, And
was thy life; its blood-y close Hath placed thee with the sons of light, A



speak the an - guish of a land That shook with hor - ror at thy fall; And
mong the no - ble host of those Who per - ished in the cause of right; A -



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mong the no - ble host of those Who per - ished in the cause of right.

—Selected.



